

**Wilmette, IL** - U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk (R-Highland Park) kicked off an effort to deliver hundreds of phone cards to soldiers in Iraq in time for them to call their loved ones on Father's Day.

During an all-school assembly on Monday, fifth and sixth graders at Highcrest Middle School in Wilmette joined with leaders from SBC and AT&T to help kick off the "Phone Calls for Father's Day" project. Highcrest students presented Congressman Kirk with 130 phone cards and more than \$1000 raised in one week to support the project. Joining Kirk at the assembly was Max McGee, Wilmette District 39 Superintendent, Cathy Rosen, Principal of Highcrest Middle School and Carrie Hightman, President, SBC Illinois.

"Highcrest students are making sure many of our dads in uniform will be able to call home for Father's Day," said Congressman Kirk. "We owe a great deal to thousands of fathers and mothers serving their country overseas. These cards will allow our soldiers to make a free international call home to mom and the kids."

During the assembly, Major Jerry Clark, U.S. Army, called from Balad, Iraq to personally thank the fifth and sixth graders. Carrie Hightman, President, SBC Illinois also presented Congressman Kirk with 500 phone cards donated by SBC. Hearing news of Kirk's project, AT&T donated 250 cards to send to troops in Iraq.

Currently, there are over 2,100 members of the Illinois Army Guard and 100 members of the Illinois Air Guard deployed overseas in places like Afghanistan, South Korea, Iraq and Germany. Since 9/11, the Illinois National Guard mobilized more than 7,000 service members for deployment overseas.

With the role of our military changing, many reservists are away from their families for long periods of time. It is important that our fathers in uniform can stay in touch with their loved ones, especially on Father's Day. While "Mail Call" still dominates the mode of communication soldiers' employ, the "Call Dad" project presents the opportunity for soldiers to make an international call home without cost.

"As a sailor who deployed overseas, I can report that nothing boosts your morale more than the

voices of your family," said Kirk. "The students of Highcrest, along with SBC, AT&T and all those contributing to this project are providing a much-needed boost to our brave Americans in uniform serving across the globe."

Anyone wishing to contribute a phone card or check can do so by dropping off cards and checks at the Kenilworth Post Office, 408 Green Bay Rd., Kenilworth, IL 60043, or you can mail cards and checks to Phones for Fathers, P.O. Box 301, Kenilworth, IL. 60043. Cards and checks can be received no later than 5pm on Tuesday, June 14. Details on the program are available online at <http://phonesforfathers.blogspot.com/>.

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